

*Immortal
Solitude*



Aaron J Clarke

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Please Note

This short story is a first draft and may contain errors.

Warning

This short story is intended for adult readers.

Cover Image: Photograph of the Earth taken by Apollo 8 astronaut (possibly Bill Anders) in 1968.

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AARON J. CLARKE grew up in North Queensland, attending Bowen State High School and James Cook University, where he was awarded a BA (Hons) II A in English Literature. In 2004, Jacobyte Books published his first novella, *Epiphany of Life*. Aaron is an avid reader of nineteenth-century literature and hopes to write a French novel someday. Aaron's interests are varied and range from classical music to molecular biology. In 2004, the 'Journal of Young Investigators' published his paper on Schizophrenia, an illness from which he personally suffers.

I

From the nebulous reaches of outer space, a golden, adamantine sphere travelling at a titanic rate flew past the ringed Saturn, gradually slowing as it passed Jupiter and Mars before stopping beside the cratered shell of Earth. The sphere's occupant dreaded what would happen next, but he vowed (every million years) to record its transition from a blue, green planet to a muted brown. Up ahead was the advancing red giant, whose heat and gravitational wave affected the Earth, twisting and distorting its dimensions. Tears prickled the spectator's eyes as the swollen sun finally devoured the desiccated Earth (a planet once home to him; however, that was a billion years ago). Its rocky remains were flung across the vastness of space. In time, those discarded fragments would generate life somewhere else in the cosmos. Besides, the monuments to man's vanity had crumbled long before the momentous encounter

with the giant red star. Although space probes (hurtling halfway across the Milky Way) were the only artifacts to the memory of men.

Yet still, he persevered, for although he could no longer remember his name and the identity of the deity who had given him superhuman powers, the man still, after all these years, remembered the words he uttered in that long-dead language of French.

S'il vous plaît, divin créateur de l'univers.

Bien que je sois un pécheur indigne de votre amour, je vous demande de réaliser mon souhait de dépasser les contraintes du temps et de l'espace.

S'il vous plaît, divin créateur de l'univers.

Bien que je sois un pécheur indigne à recevoir vos bénédictions, je vous demande de réaliser mon souhait de vivre au-delà des limites de l'existence mortelle.

S'il vous plaît, divin créateur de l'univers.

Bien que je sois un pécheur indigne de votre connaissance omnisciente, je vous demande de réaliser mon souhait en me communiquant votre connaissance.

S'il vous plaît, divin créateur de l'univers.

Bien que je sois un pécheur indigne votre amour, je vous demande de réaliser mon souhait de devenir un instrument de votre volonté divine pour apporter l'ordre et l'harmonie dans le monde.

At first, he did not believe his words would be taken seriously by the Creator, let alone the inhabitants of the coastal city (which had sunk under the ocean in the early 22nd century), who viewed him with ridicule, laughing at him at every opportune moment at what he said or did. Regardless, after uttering those queer words, the man felt his body and mind surging with power. Initially, he never gave credence to the voice that told him the words of creation and destruction. Yet the more the people of that doomed city chastised him, the more emboldened the voice in his mind became, so much so it told him about the imminent woes of the world. Armed with this knowledge, he could no longer countenance people's blatant lies, greed, and hypocrisy. Hence, he chanted a single word, causing a shift in the weather, whereby the clouds became

pregnant with water, causing a torrential downpour. Each time nature shed her tears, the walking path (which he frequented) became devoid of pedestrians, allowing him to move unhindered in a cosmic dance.

Before his celestial transformation, he was in a state of living death, but after the change, he felt alive, especially when walking in the tempest of wind and water. Sometimes, to the man's delight, sheet lightning would shoot jagged lines across the sky, followed by the clap of thunder, which, as a child, would have terrified him. However, like the primitive smartphone batteries, he was fully charged by nature's grandeur. *Why did he desire such powers?*

After millions of years, he was unsure where this urge to transcend the temporal time allotted to humans had come. Nonetheless, as the red giant expanded, imparting its fiery kiss on the long-abandoned Martian colonies, the genesis for desiring such powers emerged from the man's murky memory. He closed his eyes as the muscles in his body relaxed. Then the phantom players materialised,

waiting for the man (the sole spectator) to flick his wrist before commencing their performance...

II

Occidental Residential College, a monstrosity of five ochre blocks arranged around a dining hall, served as student accommodation for a mediocre North Queensland university in the 1970s. However, after twenty years, the buildings were crisscrossed with cracks and faded signs for each three-storey block. Occasionally, one heard the squawk of rainbow lorikeets interspersed with the boom of *Achy Breaky Heart* and *November Rain*; however, to the other residents' irritation, was the near-constant sound of classical music from the top corner of B Block. During mealtimes, the residents would walk to the dining hall,

pausing outside B Block, where they pointed upwards, telling each other in derisive tones:

‘That’s Adam Carson’s room. Steer clear of the college loony.’

In hindsight, they were right about Adam Carson, for he was a queer fish who did not swim in the stagnant waters that was *Occidental Residential College*. Instead, the young man swam in the mighty oceans of intense introspection, where he plunged into its depths to gain the coveted pearl of intellectual illumination. Such metaphysical speculations still required food, so he left his room and descended the stairs, where he lingered on the path leading to the dining hall and waited for most of the diners to go before entering.

‘Not meatloaf again,’ said Adam under his breath as an old woman server plonked it on his plate. She then coated it in gelatinous gravy and served it with several spoonfuls of vegetables.

Then he walked to his favourite table, far from the others that lined the hall’s cobalt-coloured carpet, and sat

down. Until then, his life did not deviate from previous days, existing in a rigid regularity that protected and imprisoned him. Yet, all of this was about to change the instant his hazel eyes locked onto a first-year resident entering the dining hall. Adam Carson was overwhelmed by the irrational and intense emotion of love at that moment, evident in his flushed complexion and quivering lips. His stomach tied itself into a knot when Adam saw him. The young man (Adam later learnt) was Rylan Grene, a mirror reflecting all his romantic yearnings.

Simply put, Rylan was sculpted from clay comparable to his, for they (give or take a year) were both of a similar age. They had the same short stature, athletic dimensions, and shade of blonde hair. At once, he had become the god of Carson's idolatry. No man or woman could compete with Rylan, no matter how beautiful and intelligent they were...all that mattered to Adam, ogling Rylan, who sat down at the opposite end of the dining hall, was winning him, even if it meant Carson's self-destruction. 'For death was far better than not having him,'

thought the lovesick youth, whose eyes scorched all those who gazed into them with profound passion.

As the first semester advanced at a rate where a day stretched into a week, the young man watched, in horror, as Jacinta (a big-breasted, second-year psychology student with flaming red hair) ingratiated herself with Rylan, who grew receptive to her charms. Each day at lunch, he watched them, focusing his fury and envy on Jacinta, whose laughter had enamoured Rylan. Adam pushed the gravy-encrusted steak around the plate with his fork. Unable to eat, he pushed it away, wiping his hands with a napkin. Later, his eyes followed them as they exited the dining hall, as Adam wrung his hands with the soiled napkin, causing them to throb with unyielding pain.

To his credit, Adam's abhorrence toward the jezebel was compressed into a point of infinite density; however, in the privacy of his dorm room, it expanded into a silent

scream, followed by a profusion of tears. *Who could blame Rylan? Biology programmed him to mate, passing his seed onto the next generation.* On the other hand, Adam had no desire to procreate; instead, he was driven by different passions: art, music, literature, and science. Deep in his heart, he hoped Rylan shared those same passions, for if he did, they would create something beautiful: an intellectual and romantic partnership that would transcend their ephemeral existence. Regardless, the venerated idol was unaware of Adam, whose natural timidity excluded him from social activities where friendships were established.

Instead, he watched the college residents as if they were actors in a movie, and he, in turn, was the omnipresent director guiding them (without their knowledge) to the movie's climax. Adam hoped, above all things, that by observing them, he would inadvertently discover the answer that had baffled him all this time. *Why had Jacinta befriended Rylan?* Each time Adam watched the pair from a secluded spot, he noticed boredom followed by a flicker of resentment in her eyes every time Rylan

stroked her cheek. ‘Was she toying with him,’ thought Adam as the pair ascended the stairs to their dorm rooms in C Block.

Overwhelmed with inquisitiveness, not to mention fascination, Adam crept up the stairs, lingering at the entrance, afraid that his passions for Rylan were spiralling into madness. He held his breath and slinked inside, hovering outside the venerated idol’s room. Pressing his ear to the door, Adam heard what he imagined to be the sounds of lovemaking. The bestial grunts that emanated from within the room overwhelmed Adam with erotic yearning, evident in his heart beating like a jackhammer for the coveted Rylan. A tear snaked down his cheek, for Adam realised he could not have him as the jezebel had now done. In anger, he pounded on the door and then dashed down the stairs, almost colliding with a cleaner whose mop bucket spilled its soapy contents onto the steps.

‘Watch it,’ said the old woman, waving her mop at the departing Adam, whose mind was like a washing machine churning with wrath and ardour.

Now, more than ever, Adam had to uncover the truth behind Jacinta's motives for beguiling Rylan, who could do no wrong in the lovesick man's eyes. As he dashed up the stairs to B Block, catching his breath at the entrance, he entered his dorm room, slumping beside the bed.

'She's ruined my chances with Rylan.' He rubbed his chin. 'Does she suspect I liked him?' He hesitated, holding back the storm of sorrow gathering in his eyes. 'No, no, that's not it... I barely interact with anyone...' Ashamed, he shielded his face. 'Jacinta is a psychology student... She may have put two and two together...' At last, tears gushed down the contours of his colourless countenance. 'Why, dear God, would she interfere?' His throat tightened, causing his words to reverberate in punctuated gasps. 'Until I know... I won't have a moment's peace.'

Day after day, Adam surveilled the couple, tracking their movements from the various lectures they took together to their weekend sojourns on the beach. Still, he was at a loss regarding Jacinta's motives towards Rylan. 'Perhaps she does indeed love the young man,' thought Adam, watching with narrowing eyes as they returned to their ochre dormitory block late at night. His gaze drifted to Rylan's room, where the electric bulb flickered for a moment, casting the shadow of the room's occupants onto the drawn white curtains; then, to Adam's despair, it faded to darkness.

Regardless, Adam had now fallen down the rabbit hole of obsession that no amount of logical reasoning could help him climb out. For he, like Alice in Wonderland, existed in a paradoxical world so out of touch with reality that nothing and, at the same time, everything made sense

to him. Defeated, he staggered back to his room, seething with mania and malice. Adam dropped on the bed, curling up into a ball, imagining Rylan and the jezebel engaged in sex.

In his imagination, whenever Jacinta looked at Adam with a glaze of indifference, she taunted, ‘Rylan’s mine.’ She spread her legs further, allowing the young buck, Rylan, to penetrate her fleshy womb with his meaty lance. She grabbed his thrusting backside while staring at the invisible spectator. ‘You can never have him, Adam.’ When Rylan discharged his seminal load, collapsing into sleepy ecstasy, the jezebel smiled, knowing full well that Adam could never satisfy the young buck’s sexual proclivity for women.

Even if Rylan were to tire of Jacinta (as she had introduced him to the pleasures of the female form), he would find another woman to replace her. There was nothing Adam could do but witness the succession of women filing in and out of Rylan’s room in the coming years. Regardless, Adam would wait till the end of the

world for when he and Rylan would be together. This delusion would drive him onwards, down the twisting trail of time.

‘Until my dying breath, I shall always love you, Rylan,’ said the young man, squeezing the pillow, imagining it was the beloved’s body. Then, the lead shutters of sleep descended over his eyes, conveying Adam to the underworld of unconsciousness.

...The high-pitch squawks of rainbow lorikeets punctured the early morning quiet. Flying half-drunk on bottlebrush nectar, they flew past the towering eucalyptus, whose outstretched branches, like a ticker-tape parade, showered leaves on the diners entering the dining hall. As Adam stumbled out of bed towards the chair on which his dressing gown hung, he noticed a letter wedged halfway underneath the door. He bent down and picked it up. He first noticed the university insignia at the top right-hand corner, followed in bold letters by the word “Urgent.” Adam tore it open without hesitation, and once his

suspensions were confirmed, he crushed the letter into a ball and aimed it at the wastebasket before tossing it in with a swift flick.

‘I’ve got to attend my classes,’ said Adam, whose legs buckled, causing him to grasp the chair for balance. ‘Otherwise, the university will expel me.’

Suddenly, he was slapped by the realisation that he would never see his beloved Rylan if he were kicked out of university. Therefore, Adam abandoned his surveillance of the couple to devote time to his studies; however, he found another way to express his love for the venerated idol.

‘I’ll write a billet-doux,’ thought Adam as the tremor in his legs dispersed.

After an uneventful day of classes, Adam staggered into his room; kicking off his shoes, he dropped onto his

bed. In another hour, he would go down to the dining hall for dinner, where the jezebel, Jacinta, would constantly remind him of his impotence in winning Rylan, who barely acknowledged the lovesick man's existence. Nonetheless, when Rylan and he were alone (which was not that often), they exchanged a smile or two, sending Adam into euphoria. To his surprise, there was a knock on the door, followed by a young man saying, 'Easter raffle tickets for sale.'

At first, Adam would have ignored the petition; however, the man's voice seemed so familiar that he leapt from the bed and opened the door where the venerated idol stood before him, leaving Adam gasping for air.

'Are you all right, mate?' asked Rylan, whose eyes widened with concern.

Adam nodded, triggering a smile from the young man whose bulging biceps unleashed a torrent of *Cool Water*, a fragrance that evoked a trip to the seaside in the idolator. Adam, lost in the labyrinth of lunacy, imagined they were wrestling naked on the dunes, their bodies entwined like

tree roots around the other. However, the scorching sun of sanity dissolved his delusion when Rylan, fed up with waiting, asked directly, ‘Would you like to buy a ticket?’ Again, Adam nodded. ‘First prize is a basketful of chocolate Easter eggs. They’re a dollar per ticket. How many do you want?’

Overwhelmed by shyness, Adam raised two fingers, reached for his wallet on the desk, and took two gold coins. He smiled nervously as Rylan asked him his name.

‘Adam Carson,’ said he, trembling as he took the tickets from Rylan. In that instant, their hands touched, causing Adam to burn with excitement.

‘I’ll catch you later, Adam,’ said the young man with a wink.

His departing figure reminded Adam of a Gaelic athlete, evident in the solid white legs covered in a down of blonde hair, fully satisfying Adam’s appetite that he no longer craved food. Thus, Adam set to work, composing his letter, a confession of all that he held dear about Rylan: his beauty, intelligence and, above all, the emotions the

idol roused in the young epistoler, who was intoxicated by the flurry of words forming on the page. Like Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's opera, Adam's primary concern as time passed was unburdening his love. Nevertheless, the fear of being scorned (similar to how Onegin had treated Tatyana) gave him a sudden chill as he reached the end. *Would he have the courage to slip the letter under Rylan's door?*

III

Not even the players performing their roles could fill the emptiness in his heart, so he clicked his fingers, and they dematerialised into nothingness. Death to him would be a welcomed escape. No more would he watch civilisations rise from the swamp of primitiveness to social sophistication, only to self-destruct in a mushroom cloud of heat and radiation. Fragments of his mortal life emerged

from the primordial ocean of his memory. He remembered overdosing on sleeping pills. In that non-existent state, there was no God or departed loved ones to guide him into heaven; there was only darkness and no concept of self or time. God had forsaken him, barring him from being reunited with the cherished idol of his idolisation. Perhaps it was His way of punishing him by giving him what he desired: powers beyond the scope of man. He wished he never uttered those words in French.

Only in death would he be reunited with his lost half (a part of himself that existed beyond the burial shroud, which he hoped one day to remove.) Like Orpheus, he wanted to descend into the underworld to reclaim his lost love; however, that was beyond his near god-like powers. Instead, he had the constant hours to keep him company, overwhelming him with emotions he wanted to experience again, for they reminded him of what it was to be human. Hence, with a wave of his hand, the players rematerialise, beginning where they left off in the drama that was his former life.

Adam crept along the corridor at the devil's hour, his trembling hand containing the fated letter to the beloved, who was a few doors away. In a state of religious ecstasy, he paused in front of the door and bent down, slipping the letter underneath the gap. His life rested on what Rylan would say to him. However, he sensed a shadow lurking in the background, watching him with spiteful eyes that would send whoever looked into them with madness. Fearful, Adam dashed down the corridor into the welcoming embrace of the night. At that moment, he worried about the consequences of what he wrote, for they were full of an overwhelming yearning to stroke Rylan's golden locks and kiss his rubescent lips, which he imagined tasted like honey. His quickening heart slowed to a crawl. Tears streamed down his cheeks at the thought of being spurned, for this was far worse than death. The

residential college was as silent as the dead in their graves as he returned to B Block.

Unable to sleep, Adam watched the sun's golden disk rise in the east, flooding the college in its aureole purity, yet instead of warming him, the light lashed his mind with irrationality. He stuffed the pillow into his mouth to muffle the screams of despair, for he feared Rylan's rejection. *How would he endure the unendurable?* Once the madness had arisen into the heavens, Adam removed the pillow and rose from the bed; his legs gave way like a house of cards, causing him to fall with a thud to the floor. An instant later, there was a knock on the door, causing Adam to recover his wits, evident in his legs regaining their vigour. *Perhaps it was Rylan at the door?* He rushed towards the wooden portal, jerking it open; he saw Jacinta's stern stare.

‘You don't remember me from primary school?’

‘Well, er... should I?’

‘Of course you wouldn’t... I was a short, dumpy girl with a mouthful of metal braces.’ Jacinta stroked his hand. ‘I never forgot your kindness when others taunted me from here to Timbuktu.’

‘For heaven’s sake, why are you pursuing Rylan? Don’t you understand, Jacinta, your actions are like daggers in my heart?’ asked Adam, snatching his hand away.

‘When I saw you looking at Rylan.’ She stopped, glanced at the floor briefly, and then fixed her false eyes on Adam. ‘I knew at once that you loved him.’ Like bread in the oven, his anger slowly swelled. ‘Because I wanted Rylan to love me as much as you did for him. You can never have him, Adam... Until the end, he belongs to me and me alone.’

‘No,’ said the young man with climbing contempt.

‘After what I’ve been telling everyone about you, Adam... Who’d believe you? Certainly not Rylan... He’s over the moon... he aches for my body...’ Adam raised his fist. ‘Strike me with all your hatred... it’ll only confirm

your dangerousness... and the necessity for your incarceration.’ He lowered his fist. ‘You don’t have the stomach for violence... there’s something else... a more disturbing reason you can’t have Rylan.’

‘What are you suggesting, Jacinta?’

‘I’d have guessed it sooner. Subconsciously, it was what drew you to Rylan.’ Like a ripple in a pond, shock spread across his face. ‘You never suspected he was your half-brother?’

‘Half-brother?’ asked Adam, flinching in agony, for her revelation was a blow to his morality.

‘I pulled a few strings to get the relevant information... It took little to piece it all together...’ She handed him a bundle of documents. ‘Here, see for yourself if you don’t believe me. Ah, don’t rip them up... they’re copies.’

‘Does he?’

‘Rylan knows nothing... even that he was adopted...’ She raised a finger to his lips. ‘I empathise with your plight, Adam... Your conscience must be riddled with

shame... Stay silent, Adam... It's best that you disappear...' She gave him an emerald bottle of pills. 'Take them, Adam! You'll find peace and serenity. They work fast. Take them, Adam!'

Like Judas, she kissed his cheek and left, knowing full well the damage she had inflicted on the young man's scruples. Adam closed the door and drew the curtains together: the sun's purity had generated a feeling of shame for having entertained an abhorrent amour. Little did he know that Jacinta was two-faced, incapable of genuine affection, for behind the mask (that she presented to the world) was a calculating schemer who gained power from destroying love. No mortal was safe from her charms, nor that matter the world which she was hastening its destruction. Put simply, Jacinta was the personification of what is rotten in the world.

Nevertheless, Adam had drunk from the poisoned chalice that was her mendacities: never did he question it. And as the sun danced across the sky, she waited in gleeful anticipation. Most of the world was unaware of the battle

between them as mortal men were distracted by wanton consumerism and all the pleasures that money could buy with it.

As night crept to the devil's hour, when the mortal world and that of spirits coalesced, a beam of light penetrated a crack in the curtains, illuminating the emerald bottle, further tempting the insomniac Adam to unscrew the lid and consume its oval blue pills. In a dream he had earlier that night, Adam saw a little prince's body lying in a ditch, and at that moment, the world was drowned in Adam's despair at losing someone so consequential that the fate of the world, not to mention the universe, would be consumed in a tidal wave of profound pain for what Adam could never have the beloved, Rylan. In time, he would even forget what the idol of his worship looked like. Regardless, Adam discounted the dream as inconsequential, having no bearing on earthly existence.

Yet the prospect of watching a beauteous flower withered into a desiccated husk made Adam dry retch. His eyes lingered on the emerald bottle, which called to him in a sirenian sound to consume all the pills. He snatched the bottle as Bach's *Come Sweet Death* revibrated in his cranium, anaesthetising the terror of travelling into an unknown country whose customs he was unfamiliar with. Adam unscrewed the lid, pouring the pills onto his cupped hand. He hesitated, knowing there was no return once he took them. Adam closed his eyes, imagining an eternity with the venerated idol, then swallowed them.

In a death-like state, Adam glided down the row of weather-beaten headstones, dreading the discovery of the venerated idol's grave. A wave of nostalgia submerged his memory, transforming the harsh reality that Rylan could

never reciprocate his love with a more pleasing alternative, where they could spend their lives together, uncovering the universe's secrets. Tears prickled his eyes when he saw a slab of salmon pink granite engraved with the words in gold lettering:

In Loving Memory Of

Rylan George Grene

Who passed away 11th of July, 1992

18 years, 5 months

In God's care

Hysteria enveloped Adam, causing his legs like a bridge's girder to collapse under its own weight. Then a wave of angelic voices said, 'Drown the world with your tears... extinguish the flame that burns in the hearts of men.' The breath of life escaped him each time he uttered those detestable words. Regardless, he could not stop saying them, for love's sorrows were his only comfort, proving he was once alive. The clouds gathered on the

horizon, followed by a blast of wind, and then flashes of light illuminated the sky in its red glow.

His disembodied spirit descended into the Earth, where it joined the dead Rylan, whose decaying body filled Adam with nausea, for what was once beautiful was transforming into a swollen mass of putrefying gas. As the days surrendered to years, he watched in despair as Rylan's rotting corpse changed into bones. Despite that, he did not depart from the venerated idol. However, the bones disintegrated to nothingness when the years surrendered to decades. Adam realised the beloved was gone (forever out of his reach), so he ascended to the surface, where the world had become unrecognisable. Once there was land had now been covered in a seawater brine. In the distance was a shimmering city of glass mega-towers on elevated platforms.

Curious, Adam drifted like a blade of grass towards these mega-towers, observing (with interest) people going about their business, unaware they were being watched. Adam was overwhelmed with yearning when a youth

(resembling Rylan) stood on one of the mega-towers' balconies gazing out towards the expanse of water. Then, a voice told Adam, 'Release your anger and release your pain, and you will learn to love again.' After Adam uttered those words on the sea breeze, he became corporeal once more, materialising beside Rylan's reincarnation, who, rather than rejecting Adam, enveloped him with his muscular arms. The moment their lips touched, they were transformed (through apotheosis) into a god, and then a sphere descended from the sky. It transported him at a terrific rate into outer space, overtaking all man-made probes where space was warped like ripples on a pond by the sphere's wake, then it slowed before it entered a tear in space-time only to be seen every million years.

Finis